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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 TEL AVIV 003057

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS_KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that Israel has warned the PA that it will respond severely to Qassam rocket and mortar attacks by Palestinian groups in the Gaza Strip, which all media say were aimed at Israeli targets in the Katif Bloc (Gush Katif) and the western Negev Wednesday and this morning. The media reported that for the first time in months, the IAF operated against Hamas cell members spotted firing a mortar at the Katif Bloc, killing activist Ahmed Shahwan. Hatzofe bannered: "Disengagement War." Yediot cited increasing assessments among the defense establishment that the disengagement move will be carried out "under fire." Israel Radio reported that PM Sharon will convene a meeting with the heads of the defense establishment this afternoon to discuss the Palestinian attacks. The radio also quoted Deputy Defense Minister Zeev Boim as saying that the disengagement will not be carried out if rockets and mortars are fired during the evacuation.

Yediot reported that First Lady Laura Bush will visit the Al-Aqsa Mosque under heavy security, as well as the Western (Wailing) Wall and Yad Vashem.

Leading media, including Jerusalem Post (banner), reported that minors arrested during Monday's cross-country street protests against disengagement may be courting a criminal record that could stick to them for many years.

All media reported that some 30 Nobel laureates, including Vice Premier Shimon Peres, as well as other international figures, including former U.S. president Bill Clinton, gathered in Petra, Jordan, on Wednesday, to find ways to fight terror, poverty, and violence. Jerusalem Post reported that Peres briefed King Abdullah II on Israel's pullout, plugging his Labor Party, saying that its position is that the peace process should continue after disengagement.

Maariv (lead story) and other media reported that the employees' committee at the Foreign Ministry is demanding that an investigative commission be established regarding the affair of Ambassador to the U.S. Danny Ayalon.

Maariv reported that Ali Saad-Ali, a Libyan citizen representing the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has arrived in Israel to advance the process in which Magen David Adom (the Red Shield of David) will join the ICRC. Ha'aretz reported that Germany decided Wednesday that Jews who were incarcerated for at least six months in certain labor camps in Hungary, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria during World War II are now eligible to receive pension payments.

All media quoted Justice Minister Tzipi Livni and the Director General of the Prime Minister's Office, Ilan Cohen, as saying Wednesday that the government will give Katif Bloc settlers one more week to decide whether to join the Nitzanim relocation plan, and that otherwise they may not be able to move en bloc. The media reported that the settler leaders rejected the "ultimatum" and condemned the government's "spectacle of deception."

Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post reported that, in what is seen as a blow to PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Legislative Council on Wednesday refused to radically change the parliamentary election law, this increasing chances that the vote may be postponed.

Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post reported that the FBI monitored conversations in which former senior AIPAC officials Steven Rosen and Keith Weissman passed on to the Israeli Embassy in Washington and to Washington Post information received from Pentagon analyst Larry Franklin.

Citing Reuters, Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that PA Information Minister Nabil Shaath called Wednesday for the suspension of Ibrahim Mdaires, a Muslim preacher who described Jews as "a virus resembling AIDS" and denied the Holocaust in a sermon broadcast live on Palestinian television.

Ha'aretz printed a DPA (German press agency) dispatch quoting Jordanian legal sources as saying that Jordanian authorities have charged eight men with plotting to attack Israeli and American tourists in Jordan, and with planning to launch military operations in Israel from Jordanian soil in 2004 and 2005.

Ha'aretz reported that the Socialist International, a worldwide organization of socialist, social democratic, land labor parties, will meet in Israel next week for the first time in 25 years. Fatah will be sending a large delegation to the conference, which will meet in Tel Aviv on Sunday and Monday, and then move to Ramallah.

Ha'aretz reported that last week, Egyptian film star Adel Imam launched his latest film, "An Embassy in the Building," which, for the first time in Egyptian movie history, involves the character of an Israeli ambassador in an Arab capital. Ha'aretz writes that the movie could make the job of incoming Israeli ambassador Shalom Cohen easier, simply because the Egyptian public will be more used to the presence of the Israeli embassy -- even if it is only on screen.

Mideast:

Summary:

Military correspondent Amos Harel wrote on page one of independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Despite blunt threats from Israel, the Islamic organization [Hamas] is apparently calling the shots now, to a large extent holding the disengagement hostage."

Liberal columnist Yehuda Litani wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The very authorization of the [Palestinian] uprooted's mass memorial ceremonies attests to the fact that Israelis have somewhat matured."

Diplomatic correspondent Alexander Maistrovoy wrote in popular, pluralist Russian-language Novosty Nedely: "The Israeli Prime Minister would most likely prefer to make a step towards Abu Mazen, thus getting an opportunity to continue construction in settlement blocks. This would satisfy both the Americans and the Labor Party -- his coalition partner -- and also allow him to carry out the disengagement plan undisturbed."

Block Quotes:

I. "Hamas Is Calling the Shots"

Military correspondent Amos Harel wrote on page one of independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (May 19): "After a few days of relative quiet, a flare-up in Gaza showed how fragile the Israel-PA-Hamas triangle can be. Despite blunt threats from Israel, the Islamic organization is apparently calling the shots now, to a large extent holding the disengagement hostage. If Hamas wants, it can continue the shelling and force Israel to withdraw under fire, which would mean massive destruction in Gaza as the withdrawal takes place. If Hamas wants, it can hold its fire, keeping up its momentum toward the upcoming Palestinian parliamentary elections -- if they take place as scheduled -- and then create a new difficulty for Israel and the PA both.... The events yesterday in Gaza created a situation similar to the one last week in the north,

after some Hizbullah fire. Israel sees itself as obliged to retaliate for such provocations but doesn't want to overreact lest it complicate the situation. That's why Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz speaks of measured reactions.... More important, perhaps, than that was the image shown throughout the Arab world, of Palestinian troops running for their lives away from a mob throwing rocks at them while Hamas men shoot at them. At least three PA security men were wounded. So far, Hamas is the victor."

II. "Nakba Day"

Liberal columnist Yehuda Litani wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist *Yediot Aharonot* (May 19): "Israel's Independence Day is also the day of those Israeli Arabs who were uprooted -- and their descendants. Those who are dubbed 'internal refugees,' the residents of the villages inside the Green Line that were destroyed during the 1948-49 battles, and their relatives make use of the holiday. Picnics are organized on the ruins of the villages they inhabited until 57 years ago. Thus, picnics took place this year ... in dozens of villages whose residents were uprooted during the War of Independence.... Our Independence is their Nakba (catastrophe). Despite the fact that hundreds of Jews attended the uprooted's memorial ceremonies, most Israel Jews demonstrated indifference to their pain. Some of them -- mostly the younger ones -- aren't aware of it at all.... But the very authorization of the uprooted's mass memorial ceremonies attests to the fact that Israelis have somewhat matured. They're not yet prepared to identify with the other side's pain, but they're at least allowing it to publicly express its feelings in locations where its Nakba occurred."

III. "What Next?"

Diplomatic correspondent Alexander Maistrovoy wrote in popular, pluralist Russian-language *Novosty Nedely* (May 19): "The current tranquility is only temporary. The question is not whether there would be a new twist of violence, but rather when and under which circumstances.... Mahmoud Abbas's call for an immediate meeting with Sharon looked like a desperate outcry... Although Sharon's office has not yet replied, this meeting will take place at a certain point; the question is at which extent the Israeli and the Palestinian leader will succeed in changing the situation and reaching normalization.... A conflict with the U.S. administration is what Sharon needs least, especially when one takes into consideration the friction over construction in Ma'aleh Adumim. The Israeli Prime Minister would most likely prefer to make a step towards Abu Mazen, thus getting an opportunity to continue construction in settlement blocks. This would satisfy both the Americans and the Labor Party -- his coalition partner -- and also allow him to carry out the disengagement plan undisturbed."

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